



When the West Was Young

By T. A. McNEAL

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A Frontier Foot Race

BARBER COUNTY, KANSAS, was unique in that it was fairly well timbered, while the east and north of it was a treeless prairie. For several years after the first settlements a considerable part of the male inhabitants of the county made a living for themselves and families by hauling cedar posts to Wichita and Hutchinson. The posts were gathered out of the canyons of Barber and Comanche counties. In addition to the cedar there were found along the numerous streams fairly large groves of cottonwood, elm, hackberry and walnut.

As most of the timber grew on government land, that is on land the government held in trust for the Osage Indians, no one had a legal right to cut and haul away any of it, but in those days by common consent certain laws were respected and others were not. While the settlers in Barber considered it entirely legitimate to cut and haul timber from the government land either to sell or use for fuel, they drew the line to a considerable extent on outsiders.

It was not uncommon for some Barberite who had secured an appointment as deputy United States marshal to arrest some impecunious wood-hauler from Harper, Pratt or Kingman County, make him give up his load and in some cases what money he might happen to have on his person, under threat that if he refused to come across he would be dragged before a United States court and jailed and fined. It is only fair to say that not many men would engage in this sort of a blackmailing scheme, but a few unprincipled scoundrels did make some revenue in that way.

One day a number of Harper men drove over into Barber and loaded their wagons with firewood cut from government land. Among them was a boy of perhaps 15, by the name of Kittleman. The wood-haulers made the mistake of driving through the town of Medicine Lodge with their loads. The sheriff and his deputy who were not very busy that day arrested the Harper men, compelled them to unload and with some admonitions about the seriousness of cutting and removing timber from public lands, permitted them to proceed homeward with empty wagons, sadder and also decidedly madder men than they were before. Their despoilers regarded it a good joke on the Harper men and also as an easy way of securing firewood, for they immediately appropriated the loads which had been gathered with much labor and perspiration by the men from Harper.

Couldn't Forget the Wood Deal

YOUNG KITTLEMAN treasured the memory of that transaction and determined that some time he would get even with Medicine Lodgers. He was a wonderfully active boy and as he grew developed a passion for athletic sports, especially foot racing. When he was perhaps 17 or 18 his attention was called to a prize that was offered by the county fair association of Sumner County, for the man or boy who could run 100 yards in the shortest time, and young Kittleman determined to try for the prize. The purse was large enough to attract a professional foot racer who beat the Harper lad, but he made such a phenomenal showing for an untrained racer that he attracted the attention of the professional foot racer who proposed to undertake his training with the idea of becoming his manager afterward.

Under the careful instruction of this trainer, Kittleman, within a couple of years, developed into one of the swiftest short-distance runners in the United States and probably in the world. As his fame spread, however, there still lingered in his mind the humiliation and sense of having been wronged on that

wood deal years before. While he was running races from the Atlantic to the Pacific he was figuring bet-times on a plan to get even.

In the railroadless frontier town there was not much to do and time often hung heavy on the hands of the resident sports. They necessarily had to depend on their own resources for amusement. Pony racing was a favorite form of diversion, but local foot races were a close second. Young men and some who were not so young, who thought they could run, would go out on the prairie, take off boots and socks and run barefoot. Small wagers of from \$1 to \$5 were made to increase the interest. One day a lean, sinewy young man came in on the overland stage and announced that he was looking for a location for a sheep ranch. A local foot race was on and to pass away the time the prospective sheep rancher strolled out with the crowd. He seemed quite interested; said that he had always taken great interest in athletics and especially foot racing; in fact, had at one time been a professional foot racer himself and still kept his racing shoes and tights as mementos of his former triumphs. The local racers immediately began to coax him to give an exhibition of his ability; most of them had never seen a professional foot racer in action. The young man, who said his name was Calder, at first was reluctant; said that he had given up that sort of thing when he made up his mind to settle down on a ranch, but finally agreed, just to be a good fellow, that he would give an exhibition of his prowess. His running was a revelation to the Medicine Lodgers. He could run so much faster than the swiftest of them that they almost seemed to be standing still. Then, too, when dressed in his scanty racing costume he seemed to them like a perfect specimen of a runner. One of his stunts was to beat a horse running 100 yards. He would run fifty yards, turn at a post set in the ground and then back to the starting point. Where he had the advantage of the horse was in the quicker start and the ability to turn at the post before the horse could either stop or turn.

The admiration and confidence in Calder grew apace among the Medicine Lodgers. They were satisfied that he was a world beater; in fact, he assured them that he was probably the swiftest man on foot in the world. True he didn't seem to be making any particular effort to find a sheep ranch, but they did not think of that until afterward. Finally a local sport asked Calder if he knew M. K. Kittleman. He said that he had never heard of him. He was told that Kittleman claimed to be a great runner and had made the Harper people believe that he was about the fastest man who ever came down the pike. Calder smiled knowingly; said that he had seen local runners who got

that fool idea in their heads until they ran up against some person like himself who could really run, and then they discovered that they couldn't deliver the goods. There was some old-time rivalry between Medicine Lodge and Harper and here was a chance to take the railroad town down a few notches. Word was sent to the Harper people that if they thought their man Kittleman was a runner, to bring him over to the Lodge where there was a man who would trim him. Kittleman was willing, suspiciously, joyously willing, as was recalled afterward.

A purse was made up by Medicine Lodgers of \$100 with the privilege of betting all they cared to on the side.

Off Like a Rocket

THE race was to start with the shot of a revolver, the distance 100 yards. When Kittleman stripped for the contest there was a look of surprise on the faces of a good many Medicine Lodge sports. At that time Kittleman was the finest specimen of physical manhood I have ever seen. He stood nearly six feet and was magnificently proportioned. Without an ounce of surplus flesh and apparently no over-development, his muscles rippled under his skin which was white as marble and soft as satin. For the first time the backers of Calder discovered that in point of physical development their supposed champion was no match for the Harper lad. But they had seen him run and had confidence. Besides, had he not assured them that he was the fastest runner in the United States and that he would make that man Kittleman look like a tortoise? So they cheerfully bet their substance, which Kittleman and his backers eagerly covered and hungered for more.

At the crack of the pistol Kittleman seemed to shoot through the air like an arrow from a bow. At the first bound he covered nearly twenty-five feet and the Medicine Lodge sports knew that their money was gone. Calder was beaten about ten yards and at that Kittleman seemed to make little effort.

When the stake money was handed over to the victor Calder burst into tears; said that he had bet every dollar he had in the world on himself and that now he was dead broke among comparative strangers. His plea touched the hearts of the cowboys who immediately took up a collection for his benefit and though they had been losers themselves turned over to him \$25 or \$30, enough to pay his way back to his friends. The next day the Medicine Lodgers learned that Kittleman and Calder were having a very pleasant time together in Harper, as they had divided their winnings according to previous arrangements.

"I think maybe," remarked Kittleman afterward, "that I am even with those Medicine Lodge fellows for that load of wood."

Probably nothing in his entire life afforded Kittleman more satisfaction than this race. "But then," he afterward said to me as he laughed with joy, "you saw a real race. Calder (that was not his name, by the way) ran his level best. He was nearly scared to death; afraid some of the cowboys would find out that it was a put up job and shoot him. I told him: 'Young feller, the only show you have to keep from being shot is to go through, run your best and then do the weeping act after. If you quit now they will kill you sure.' And say! He wasn't such a bad actor, was he? I never knew before that he could cry like that."

SUPERIOR MAN



(Brown, in the Chicago Daily News)